1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

50. The apportionment of virgin land is decided at a general palaver in which all of the senior male members (*tuai bilek*) of the families of the long-house participate. But before this is held most *bilek* families have taken some measure of independent action. As soon as the sowing of one year's crop has been completed, a *bilek* family begins to plan the whereabouts of its farm of the following season, and general farming arrangements are premeditated by about two or three years. On my arrival at Rumah Nyala in 1949, for example, the people announced to me that they intended to take two more crops from the area in which they were then farming, and then return to secondary jungle in the main valley of the Sut; and this in fact is what they did. The process of selecting virgin forest for felling is not, however, highly organized, but rather unplanned and casual, with each *bilek* family acting largely on its own initiative. As already explained, it is usual for a small group of *bilek* families to operate in the same immediate area. After sufficient consultation to ensure that the plans of others are not being wilfully contravened, a *bilek* family declares its intention of farming a certain area, by setting up on it a sign, or *pesindang*, which consists of a notched stick and a cross-piece.

At the same time a small area surrounding this *pesindang* is cleared of undergrowth. Once this has been achieved, every opportunity is taken to acquaint all the other members of the community with what has been done. Where possible the matter is brought up on some semi-formal occasion—such as after a *bedara*, or minor ritual offering, when most of the senior members of the community are assembled on the *ruai* of the long-house. In this way the arrangement receives public recognition. Instances of conflict are rare. Often there is a certain amount of 'jockeying' for position, but once a *bilek* family has established its *pesindang* at the foot of a spur, there is little chance of this fait accompli being abrogated; and thereafter, tenure is governed by the principles already enunciated. Thus several months before a new year's farming begins, the intentions of most of the *bilek* families of the community are generally known.

51. There is however, one occasion in particular for the public discussion of questions of land tenure. This is following the *matak ka burong* ritual (which usually falls sometime in May), when the augur (*tuai burong*) of the community distributes to all *bilek* families desiring them, omen sticks (*kayu burong*), to be used during the initial stages of the new agricultural cycle. As soon as this important ritual has been concluded, a discussion of precise plans for the coming year breaks out. The arrangements of most families are firmly settled by this time, but there are commonly several who have not reached a final decision. In particular, this is the time when requests for the use of another family's secondary jungle (*damun*) are made. All secondary jungle is privately owned by different families, but in most communities there is a certain amount of 'borrowing' and inter-change of *damun*. Thus a family may, for various reasons, want to remain for another year in an area in which its own holdings of secondary jungle are not quite adequate to its needs; in these circumstances, the usual course is to request (*minta*) the temporary use of an adjoining strip of *damun* belonging to someone else. Usually such requests are granted, but there is no change of tenure, only the taking of one season's crop. Reciprocity is the principle governing these transactions; and occasionally a simple inter-change of *damun* is arranged by two *bilek* families. It does sometimes happen however, that rent (*tase damun*) is charged for the usufruct of secondary jungle. But this is a rare occurrence; during my two years in the Baleh, I did not encounter a single instance of rent being paid for *damun*, and according to Iban informants, it

1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

427 happens but seldom ("*Jarai, jarai bulih!*"). Furthermore, when rent is paid it is seldom more than one or two dollars. The Iban explanation of the custom is that it is primarily a device for putting pressure on someone who is reluctant to lend his land. When it is seen that a person is parsimonious (*rangka*) of his holdings, the *tase* payment is made simultaneously with a public request for the use of a patch of his *damun*, and in this way, say the Iban, he is shamed into agreement.

52. By and large, the Iban are a strait-handed people, and even between close kin there is sometimes considerable niggardliness over land. I recall an instance of this at the *matak ka burong* ritual held at Rumah Nyala, on 1st May, 1950. After the augur (*tuai burong*) had distributed his omen-sticks, a general discussion on farming arrangements for the coming year began. Among those present were Usah (48 years), and his mother's brother, Gasan (70 years); these two men were of different *bilek* families, but occupied neighbouring apartments in the main long-house. Usah said that he had come to ask Gasan for the use of a patch of secondary jungle (about 2 acres) adjoining the land which he (Usah) was intending to farm during the coming year. Gasan replied that on various occasions in the past, he had been liberal with his *damun*, but that many others in the long-house were not, and that he had now become disinclined to lend his land. There the matter was allowed to stand, no other member of the house making any attempt to intervene on behalf of Usah. It is significant to note that such requests between close kin are broached for the first time in public, and further that each *bilek* family possesses absolute powers over all land acquired by the felling of primary jungle. Thus, if a *bilek* family refuses to grant a request for the loan of secondary jungle, though persuasion is possible, no-one in the community can compel them to alter their decision. Nowhere in the Baleh did I come across farming land (*damun*) that had been bought or sold by Iban.

425 53. A *bilek* family's rights over secondary jungle are not held in unconditional perpetuity however, but only for as long as the family remains a member of the long-house community in whose territory its holdings lie. Thus, when a *bilek* family moves (*mindah*) to a new district and takes up permanent residence there, its old land rights lapse, and are gradually assumed by remaining kindred. In both 1949 and 1950, for example, Ubong (*bilek* No. 19) farmed secondary jungle which had belonged to the *bilek* family of a third cousin, who had left Rumah Nyala, and settled in the Sungai Mujong, about ten years previously. Ubong had not consulted his cousin in any way. In other words, such 'unowned' *damun* is treated as though it were primary jungle, and the first person to re-fell it establishes presumptive rights over its use in future years. In past years it frequently happened that an entire community moved on to occupy new country, and in this event the whole of their former territory was simply abandoned. For example the secondary jungle in the Katibas district, formerly owned by *bilek* families now living in the Baleh, is at present being farmed by subsequent settlers, who are either complete strangers, or only very remotely related to the original 'owners.' So rapid and chequered was the Iban advance in the Kapit District that down river communities often find themselves in possession of secondary jungle, the first fellers of which are not known. I also encountered a number of instances of this in the Sungai Sut. In 1944, a number of *bilek* families from Rumah Nyala moved into the headwaters of a tributary of the Sut, called Sungai Nyunggau. The Sungai Nyunggau belonged, in fact, to a neighbouring long-house, Rumah Ikau, but its people considered the land to be unpropitious. Some years before a leper had been secluded there (this is normal Iban practice).

5: Roth E-4 (no date) 1892 OC6 Iban OC6

The NATIVES *of* BORNEO. Edited from the Papers of the late BROOKE LOW, Esq., by H. LING ROTH.

II. LAND TENURE AND CULTIVATION; HABITATIONS; SLAVES; DRESS, PERSONAL ORNAMENT AND FASHIONABLE DEFORMITY; HUNTING; FISHING; NAVIGATION; WEAPONS AND WAR-DRESS; AGGRESSIVE WARFARE; DEFENSIVE WARFARE; HEADS; CAPTIVES; CANNIBALISM; MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND SINGING.

1.—*Land Tenure and Cultivation.*

As regards the tenure by which land is held, it has been the immemorial custom that when a person fells the virgin forest, he acquires by that act a perpetual title to the land. It is his from henceforth to do with as he pleases; he may sell it, or lend it, or let it. The rent he is empowered to demand may not exceed in value a dollar, and must be either a game-cock, or a sucking-pig, or a couple of plates. But as land is rising in value every year, and old jungle is becoming scarcer and scarcer, there is a

5: Roth E-4 (no date) 1892 OC6 Iban OC6

marked tendency among the tribes to demand a heavier rent—in fact several dollars a year. The tenure, too, has been modified within late years in view of the increasing demand for accommodation, and it is now generally understood that when the proprietor chooses to leave the district and remove into a distant country he forfeits, by so doing, all title to the ground and can no longer exact rent.

Agriculture with the Sea Dyaks is in a very backward condition, but they contrast very favourably with the Malay population in the vicinity. Neither use the plough nor buffalo, but the former cultivate on a more extensive scale and with a more provident idea. They grow, both individually and collectively, far more than they require for their own consumption, and with the residue they purchase necessaries, such as salt, steel, iron, and luxuries, such as personal ornaments, for their families. If the harvest has been really plentiful they are even able to afford to purchase gongs and toddy, and perhaps a jar or two.

As a rule they prefer to cultivate hilly soil, but some few have learnt to utilize the wet land. Their farming operations are regulated by the position in the heavens of the Seven Stars of the Pleiades. They commence business towards the end of the dry season, July and August, so that they have the wet monsoon to bring the paddy to maturity, and the beginning of the following fine weather, April and May, to ripen the grain.

The old jungle is called *kampong*, and the new is called *temuda*. The Dyaks prefer infinitely to farm the former whenever it is to be obtained within reasonable distance of the village, and when it is getting scarce in their immediate neighbourhood they shift their residence nearer to it. In parts of the country more populous than others, it frequently happens that the Dyaks have not in their territory any old jungle; such situations are not so laborious to prepare, but being destitute of the rich layer of vegetable mould and the fertilizing properties of burnt wood, are not nearly so productive. After having felled the old jungle and farmed on it once, they leave it for seven years to grow up again and are then ready to use it a second time. The first year's growth is called *kranch*.

When it is intended to open out new country, the first thing to be done is for every family to select an eligible piece of forest land and to mark out the quantity they wish to cultivate. The next step is to *beburong*, that is to say to consult the omen birds of the tribe to learn whether or no they approve of this choice. For this purpose they erect a hut first in one quarter then in another of the land in question, and wait upon the birds for

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

to buy it. "A" and "B" seemed to be quite strangers to one another. "A" examined the jar "B" had brought, and then said: "My jar is not a good one; I admit that. But this is a genuine old jar, and worth the eighty dollars he asks for it. I have not got much money with me; but if anyone here will lend me the money, I am quite prepared to pay eighty dollars for it." As "A" was well known, the headman of the house lent him the sum of money he required to enable him to buy the jar. The money was paid to "B," who went off. Then "A" began to boast about his bargain; he dwelt on all the good points of the jar, and told the Dyaks that they were very foolish to have let such a chance slip. He praised the jar so much that the headman of the house said he would buy it from him for the same price as he paid for it. "A" said he did not want to part with it, as it was a genuine old jar, and honestly worth much more than he gave for it. After some discussion "A" agreed to sell it to the Dyak for one hundred dollars, and so he made a profit of twenty dollars in a very short time.

It was found out afterwards that "B" was living with "A" during his stay in Krian! The jar was considered by experts to be a modern imitation and comparatively worthless. When "A" was spoken to about the matter, he persisted in saying that in his opinion the jar was a genuine old one, but that he might be mistaken.

With regard to land, it has been the immemorial custom of the Dyaks that when a person fells the virgin forest he acquires by that act a perpetual title to the land. He may sell it, lend it, let it, or leave it to his successor. The rent he is supposed to demand for a piece of land large enough to be farmed by one man is one dollar. If, however, he is not paid in money, he may claim a game-cock, or two

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

427 plates. As a gamecock or two plates cost about a quarter of a dollar, it is dearer to pay for the use of land with money. Land disputes are very common among Dyaks. 691 As they often leave a particular district, and then return again after many years, it is not surprising that complications arise.

423 Fruit-trees are owned by the people who plant them. The different families in a Dyak house plant fruit-trees 245 near their part of the house. When they leave the spot and build a new habitation elsewhere, they each still claim ownership of the trees they planted. The rule with regard to fruit-trees is that anyone may take the ripe fruit that has fallen, but only the owner or someone deputed by him may climb the tree. Banting Hill, where I lived for some years, was covered with fruit-trees (*durian*), and at night during the fruit season crowds of men and boys would watch for the falling of the ripe fruit. They would each have a torch made of the bark of some tree, and they would sit and wait with the torch smouldering by their side. As soon as a ripe *durian* fruit was heard to fall, they would wave their torches in the air to make them flare up into a flame, and they would rush to the spot, and the person who found the fruit would take possession of it.

567 Slavery exists among the Dyaks, but not to any great extent. There are two classes of slaves—captives in war, and slaves for debt.

The Sea Dyaks when on the warpath spare neither man, women, nor children, but it occasionally happens that when they are able to do so, they carry little children back with them as captives. There are not many slaves to be met with among the Sea Dyaks, and these do not seem to be hardly treated. The slaves are not distinguishable

243 621 [423] avoid possible conflicts due to overlapping claims to the same ancestral lands. Further, if a member of the house who has moved away to another longhouse because of marriage (nguai), or for some other reason has been away, wants to activate his rights to farm land claimed by his natal [427] bilik, he may do so at that time. Although renting land is not common, it does occur and a token fee of one pasu of padi per acre is charged cf. Freeman 1955:147-8).

243 796 [227] The annual meeting is held at about the end of April, after the previous year's crop has been brought to the house and stored. At that meeting, the date for the Gawai Batu ("Festival of the Whetstone") is set, and the members of the community begin preparations (nengkira) by cooking tuak ("rice wine"), collection and purchase of food, and the inviting of guests. The purpose of the Gawai Batu is to assure a good harvest in the new year.

[412] A ritual center (pandong) is made on each family's ruai, with the whetstone (batu ansah), tools to be used in farming such as weeding knives (ilok), knives (duku'), hoes (changkul), sickles (pitu'), and axes (kapak), together with baskets of seed (benih), wrapped in a woven blanket (pua' kumbu').

243 621 796 At the meeting held to plan the gawai, each tuai bilik states which guests his family will invite. Generally, all members of nearby houses will be invited, while only a few selected friends from more distant houses will be asked to attend. However, if members of the house

369 In several visits to the now-razed Rumah Temuai ("Guest House"), I discovered that only those Iban who knew no single persons in Sibu stayed there. Some were there to visit sick relatives in the hospital, others were working temporarily or more permanently and saving money by living in the 369 Rumah Temuai. But as soon as they could find other lodging that their 574 resources permitted them to rent, or made acquaintances with whom they could "take shelter" (numpang), they moved out to take up other accommondations and from then on, were open to demands for hospitality from kinsmen and friends.

369 A vast majority of Iban residents in the Sibu Urban area live either 362 in rented quarters or in housing furnished by the employer. Seventy-three 427 of the Iban employees in our sample listed in Table 15 (page 197) live in [466] quarters provided by their employer. Forty-seven of these employees are renting rooms, and 22 indicated that they are living with friends or kins- [423] men in one of these two groups. It is significant that only nine of the 171 economically active Ibans in Sibu own their own homes, and all of these nine have been long-time residents of the town, and generally they are more affluent than those living in rented quarters or those furnished by the employer.

361 There is no "Iban Ward" of Sibu Urban area, the Iban population 369 being scattered from Sungai Antu to Upper Lanang Road. The heaviest concentrations tend to be at the Lanang Road Field Force Camp, where an average 1,000 members, mostly Iban, live with their families; at Sungai Antu

likely to do so. We now will consider the circumstances and factors related to groups and representative individuals who come into Sibu daily as commuters or who have moved into the town as more or less permanent residents.

B. Commuters

The principal characteristic of Ibans who travel in and out of Sibu daily to work is their proximity to the pasar. Workers from Rumah Nyala use bicycles over a path past Sungai Merah into Sibu. From Nanga Assan, Langgup, Bidut and other nearby areas, workers use launches or small ferries, either bringing bicycles with them or using the bus service near the jetty to get to the place of employment. About one dozen men drive private taxis from the Oya and Durin Roads, bringing in passengers from their communities and other fares that they pick up along the road. Although transportation is available for greater distances, the cost of the fare is prohibitive so that persons from more remote areas find it cheaper to rent a room for twenty-five dollars.

Commuters include both men and women. Men predominate in various types of work offering regular employment, such as gardening, construction, brickyard, clerking, and custodians. Though there are a few exceptions, most men who commute are employed in labor activities with relatively low rates of wages. Most women who commute are best categorized as self-employed (nitih ka kereja diri' empu), such as selling vegetables in the Iban market or as bar-girls. Of the fifty-five members of Rumah